

Grundy, Sidney
Sympathetic souls

PR
4729
G358
1900

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SYMPATHETIC SOULS

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SYMPATHETIC SOULS

A Comedietta in One Act

FOUNDED ON THE FRENCH OF EUGENE SCRIBE

BY

SYDNEY GRUNDY

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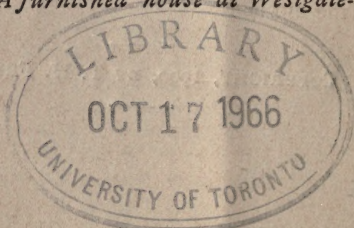
SYMPATHETIC SOULS.

First produced at the Princess of Wales Theatre,
Kennington, 26th February, 1900.

CHARACTERS.

CAPTAIN PALLISER, *Mr. Davis Davis.*
MR. PONSONBY, A solicitor, . . *Mr. L. F. Chapuy.*
MRS. BELLRINGER, A widow, . . *Miss Mary Rorke.*
PARKINSON, Her maid, *Miss Margaret Parker.*

SCENE.—*A furnished house at Westgate-on-Sea.*



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SYMPATHETIC SOULS.

SCENE.—*A sitting-room. Doors R. and L. French window at the back, opening upon a garden. Piano open with a sheet of music on it; on top of the piano a violin. A man's portrait. Sofa.*

Enter L., as curtain rises, PARKINSON, followed by MR. PONSONBY, who crosses her to R. C.

PARK. My mistress will be down directly, sir.

PON. How is she?

PARK. Just the same.

PON. In tears still?

PARK. Morning, noon, and night.

PON. That's bad.

PARK. I never saw the like of it. The idea of a woman crying her eyes out for a husband who's been dead a twelvemonth, when, if she only looked about her, she might have a new one any day she liked.

PON. It's curious, Parkinson, but it is human nature. She might have a new one—plenty of new ones—so she doesn't want a new one. She can't have the old one—so she wants the old one.

PARK. (C.) Was he very good to her?

PON. (R. C.) On the contrary, he treated her so badly that they had to separate. In England he could do no good at all: he disagreed with everybody. By way of giving him another chance, his partner shipped him to the River Plate. There he began by disagreeing with the climate—missed his chance—and caught the yellow fever.

PARK. I don't see much to cry about in that.

PON. You forget, Parkinson, he has been dead twelve months. Time, like a fashionable artist, does not paint the warts. Good husbands are like original dramatists—always dead.

PARK. But is it certain that he *is* dead, sir?

PON. It was announced in all the newspapers.

PARK. Then there is no hope—and my poor mistress will be bored to death—shut up here all alone.

PON. Great sorrows prefer solitude.

PARK. She'll yawn herself into an early grave.

PON. Great sorrows never yawn.

PARK. But she's always yawning. When she's not crying, she does nothing else.

PON. (*crosses to L., rubbing his hands*) That's good. It shows she's getting tired of it.

PARK. I wanted her to try a tune on the piano, but of course she wouldn't—because *he* wasn't here to accompany her. (*pointing to portrait*)

PON. Used he to accompany her?

PARK. On the violin. (*points to the violin. N. B.—Any instrument which the representative of CAPTAIN PALLISER can play will serve the purpose*)

PON. Strange!

PARK. Very strange!

PON. But it's human nature. These good-for-nothing fellows always do.

PARK. Accompany their wives, sir?

PON. On the violin. Here's your mistress. Leave us.

Enter MRS. BELLRINGER in very becoming mourning.

PARK. A new mourning dress! (*aside. Exit R.*)

MRS. B. Ah, Mr. Ponsonby!

PON. My dear Mrs. Bellringer, I am delighted to observe the change in your appearance.

MRS. B. Do I look better?

PON. Your new dress suits you to perfection.

MRS. B. (*crosses R.*) I had forgotten that I had it on. I really take no notice what I wear. You know that my appearance is to me a matter of indifference.

PON. But not to *me*. The straw that shows which way the wind blows is a trifle, but it isn't on that account to be disregarded. The mourning, I observe, is a shade deeper than before.

MRS. B. (*by table R.*) Yes; I expressly ordered it.

PON. I'm rejoiced to see it. It shows you're recovering.

Mrs. B. How so?

PON. (C.) Grief is sufficient for itself. When sorrow

seeks assistance from the dressmaker, it's because it feels it's in need of her.

MRS. B. You misinterpret everything I do. You know the only pleasure left to me is my unhappiness, yet you would rob me even of that satisfaction.

PON. We should be moderate even in our pleasures; and when for twelve months a woman isolates herself—

MRS. B. You are a cynic, and don't believe in the existence of a deep, eternal sorrow.

PON. Deep, yes; eternal, no.

MRS. B. Why not?

PON. The earth turns on its axis, and we with it. There is no constancy in human nature. Our loves, hopes, ambitions, are all transitory: why should our griefs be an exception to the rule? I was just reading—coming down in the express—this passage in “*La Bruyère*”: (*takes book from pocket*) “If, after a long interval, our lost loves came to life, what would be their welcome?”

MRS. B. You are too cynical.

PON. It isn't I; it's “*La Bruyère*.” (*moves to L.*)

MRS. B. (*going up to portrait*) But you agree with him. You don't believe that I shall never cease to mourn my poor lost Ferdinand. (*places flowers on easel*)

PON. I certainly don't. Some morning, or some evening, you'll be surprised to find you're quite resigned to your bereavement.

MRS. B. Horrible idea! (*crosses to table*) To business, Mr. Ponsonby, if you please. (*sits R. of table*)

PON. To business, by all means. (*sitting L. of table and taking papers from pocket*) Poor dear Ferdinand has left your accounts in a most unsatisfactory condition.

MRS. B. That is so like him. The dear love was never good at arithmetic.

PON. He appears to have helped himself to what belonged to *you*, at his pleasure.

MRS. B. How vividly this conversation recalls him! Such was his habit!

PON. In effect, you have a bare subsistence left to you.

MRS. B. It is enough to spend upon bewailing him.

PON. Too much, decidedly; but not enough to live upon in comfort.

MRS. B. I prefer discomfort.

PON. Well, you will have your wish if you insist on

living in the depths of Epping Forest in the house which you instructed me to take for you.

MRS. B. You have secured it ?

PON. There was no difficulty in the matter. It has lain empty for the last ten years.

MRS. B. Then I can go at once.

PON. You wish to leave Westgate ?

MRS. B. The place is not to be endured. When the wind blows this way, I can distinctly hear the band on Margate jetty.

PON. Dear, dear me !

MRS. B. Besides, through an agent, I have let this house, and the new tenant may come at any moment.

PON. That's unfortunate ! It's clear you can't go to your new home till it's finished.

MRS. B. Ferdinand's portrait will be furniture enough. I will hang Ferdinand——

PON. Hang him by all means. You are p'r'aps not aware that your new house is damp. The wet runs down the walls.

MRS. B. I can imagine that they weep for Ferdinand ; yes, I prefer them so.

PON. Prefer wet walls !

MRS. B. It's a matter of taste !

PON. Excuse me ; it's a matter of plumbing. Then, again, there are no drains to speak of.

MRS. B. So much the better. Drains are not a pleasant subject of conversation.

PON. I see you're determined to be satisfied ; but when you're laid up with typhoid fever——

MRS. B. It may terminate a life which has no object.

Re-enter PARKINSON, R.

PARK. Lunch is ready, ma'am. (MRS. BELLRINGER *crosses to C.*)

PON. That's the first sensible remark I've heard for the last quarter of an hour.

PARK. If you please, lunch is ready, ma'am.

MRS. B. You can remove it, Parkinson.

PON. Eh ? (*alarmed*)

MRS. B. I've no appetite,

PON. But if you will excuse me——

MRS. B. Forgive me for forgetting your long journey. You, of course, eat ?

PON. Occasionally, ma'am. (PARKINSON goes up to window)

MRS. B. (C.) For my part, I can conceive nothing more absurd than this continual endeavor to prolong by artificial means a life which is insupportable.

PON. It is a matter of taste, Mrs. Bellringer, and when the artificial means emit so very savory (going to door R.) an odor——

MRS. B. Appetite is a curious phenomenon.

PON. (opening door R.) Let us investigate it further.

MRS. B. As you please. (exit R., followed by MR. PONSONBY)

PAKK. (who has gone to window) Hallo! who's this? Another visitor? In mourning too! He's coming in! Well, I declare! another of them! (comes down to L. of sofa)

Enter through window CAPTAIN PALLISER in mourning, very pale, with black gloves. He comes straight down R., sits L. of table, puts down hat, takes out pocket-handkerchief, puts his elbow on the table, leans his head upon his hand and sighs into his pocket-handkerchief, which covers his face.

PARK. Sir! (he takes no notice but sighs again. Crosses to him) Sir!

PAL. (rises) Madam!

PARK. May I ask who you are?

PAL. My name is Palliser.

PARK. Mine's Parkinson.

PAL. Do you belong to this house?

PARK. Yes, sir!

PAL. I have come to take possession. (covers his face with his pocket-handkerchief)

PARK. (aside) It's the new tenant, Captain Palliser. (aloud) I'll tell my mistress! (crossing behind table to door R.)

PAL. Isn't she gone yet? (rising)

PARK. No, sir.

PAL. Then good-morning. (going)

PARK. Stay!

PAL. I do not wish to see her. Tell her that when it is convenient for her to go, I will return. Good-morning. (goes to window, stops short, sighs)

PARK. (*crossing to him*) But she's coming, sir!

PAL. Good-morning! (*exit through window to L.*)

Re-enter MRS. BELLRINGER, R.

MRS. B. I can eat nothing. At the sight of food—

PARK. Here's an adventure! Captain Palliser has come to take possession!

MRS. B. I won't see him; he must go away.

PARK. He's gone, ma'am.

MRS. B. (*down R. C.*) Gone?

PARK. *He's* in deep mourning too, ma'am, and he sighs—oh, worse than you.

MRS. B. You interest me. (*going up to window*) Can he too have sustained some bereavement?

PARK. See! he's coming back! (*pointing off L. through window*)

MRS. B. (*moving up*) Let us go, Parkinson. We will respect his grief.

PARK. Poor man! how miserable he looks! (*crosses to door L.*)

MRS. B. Do you think so? (*coming down R. C.*)

Re-enter CAPTAIN PALLISER *through window.*

PAL. (*coming down L. C.*) Madam! (*bows*)

MRS. B. Sir! (*curtseys*)

PAL. Pardon my abruptness; but, having caught sight of your mourning dress, I could not resist the temptation of making the acquaintance of its wearer. Like me, you are deploring some great loss.

MRS. B. Are you then also the victim of a grief which admits of no consolation?

PAL. That is precisely my position. I have lost everything I held dear.

MRS. B. And I also.

PAL. (L.) My Henrietta! (*produces handkerchief*)

MRS. B. (R.) My Ferdinand! (*same bus.*)

BOTH. Excuse me! (*cover eyes*)

MRS. B. Our situations are precisely similar..

PAL. Pardon me; I am much the more to be pitied! To lose the idol of one's heart on the eve of marriage!

MRS. B. To lose it twelve months afterwards is infinitely worse.

PAL. There is no comparison.

MRS. B. Mine is the greater grief.

PAL. Excuse me.

MRS. B. Pardon me!

PARK. (C.; *aside*) If they will only have an argument!

MRS. B. Parkinson, leave the room!

PARK. (*crosses to door L.; aside*) When it was just beginning to get interesting! (*exit L.*)

MRS. B. This—Henrietta—was she very beautiful?

PAL. Words cannot speak her loveliness.

MRS. B. (*coldly*) Really!

PAL. This—Ferdinand—was he a handsome man?

MRS. B. (*going up to portrait*) His portrait does not do him justice. (CAPTAIN PALLISER *goes up towards portrait*)

PAL. (*coming down L. C.*) Evidently!

MRS. B. You will stay to dinner?

PAL. Unhappily, I have no appetite.

MRS. B. (*turning away*) Nor I.

PAL. (*crossing C.*) But if there is a vacant chair—

MRS. B. (*goes down R.*) Alas!

PAL. My presence might perhaps fill up a void.

MRS. B. (*turning*) Then you will stay?

PAL. With pleasure. (*puts hat on sofa L.*)

MRS. B. One grieves so much better in communion. When we have finished talking—

PAL. We might read to one another.

MRS. B. Poetry.

PAL. Appropriate poetry.

MRS. B. The evening will be scarcely long enough.

PAL. I trust you will not hasten your departure.

MRS. B. The house is yours, sir; I am only a trespasser.

PAL. Excuse me; it is yours till you have left.

MRS. B. Your house, sir.

PAL. Your house, madam.

MRS. B. Yours, sir.

PAL. Let us say *our* house.

MRS. B. Yes; that will meet the difficulty; and indeed, until the cottage I have taken is ready, I have nowhere else to live.

PAL. How curiously alike are our positions! Having given up my chambers, I am homeless also.

MRS. B. This house is large enough for both of us

If you would not object to be my guest, might we not so arrange it for a day or two ?

PAL. Such an arrangement would have several advantages.

MRS. B. I could then show you the last walk I went with Ferdinand.

PAL. I should be pleased to see it.

MRS. B. It is a charming walk.

PAL. And I could take you the last drive I took with Henrietta.

MRS. B. I should enjoy it.

PAL. It is in this neighborhood.

MRS. B. Poor Ferdinand !

PAL. Poor Henrietta !

BOTH. Excuse me ! (*cover eyes*)

Re-enter PARKINSON, L.

PARK. If you please, ma'am——

MRS. B. (*sharply*) What is it ?

PARK. Another gentleman to see you.

MRS. B. I am engaged.

PARK. (*coming C.*) But it's most particular.

PAL. (L.) Your mistress can see nobody. She's engaged.

MRS. B. Will you go, Parkinson ?

PARK. Yes, ma'am ; but how——

PAL. Will you go, Parkinson ? (MRS. BELLRINGER *stamps her foot*)

PARK. (*crossing to door L.; aside*) What does this mean, I wonder ? (*exit L.*)

MRS. B. What a provoking interruption of our grief !

PAL. Just when we were enjoying it so thoroughly. (*crossing behind MRS. BELLRINGER, brings chair from L. of table to R. C.*) Won't you be seated ?

MRS. B. Thanks ! (*they sit*) What were we saying ?

PAL. We were saying—— (*bringing down chair from L. of window*)

MRS. B. Ah ! it all comes back to me ! Again I gaze upon that handsome face !

PAL. (*rising*) Madam !

MRS. B. I was addressing Ferdinand !

PAL. Oh ! (*sits*) I beg your pardon.

MRS. B. Ah, Captain Palliser, how the mind loves to dwell upon the memory of past happiness !

PAL. And on the other hand, how bitterly our conscience reproaches us, when it is too late, for an occasional sharp word—a passing gust—

MRS. B. You had occasional sharp words, then?

PAL. She was so fond of me—so jealous of the least attention to another; and being rather a coquette herself—expostulation sometimes led to recrimination. Recrimination was followed by tears; and tears resulted naturally in hysterics. How bitterly I regret it now! Forgive me, dearest!

MRS. B. (*rising*) Captain Palliser!

PAL. I was apostrophising Henrietta!

MRS. B. Oh! (*sits*) I beg your pardon.

PAL. Happily you have no such painful memories?

MRS. B. On the contrary, you probably have the advantage of me there. You were engaged; I was married. The happiness one anticipates is always greater than that one possesses. A little later, perhaps, the dream would have been dissipated; for matrimony, even at the best, is not what courtship paints it. In the best regulated households, there are little moments of ill-humor—passing fits of—

PAL. You had little moments of ill-humor then?

MRS. B. Who is exempt from them? But they were justified, if only by our reconciliations. Poor Ferdinand! (*rising and addressing his portrait*) You had a hasty temper, but the kindest heart! (*placing chair left of table*)

PAL. (*rising and putting chair back near piano; aside*) I'm glad *they* disagreed sometimes. (*catching sight of the sheet of music upon the piano*) Ah!

MRS. B. What! (*going to piano*)

PAL. That sheet of music! It is the last air that I heard her play.

MRS. B. (*taking the music from the top of piano*) I will remove it. (*sits at piano*)

PAL. No! No!

MRS. B. Since it awakens painful memories!

PAL. I never hear it played, but it affords me the most exquisite enjoyment. (MRS. BELLRINGER *sits and plays*) Thank you a thousand times. I seem to hear her once more. True, your touch is better—your execution is more finished; but it's the same air.

MRS. B. One of my poor love's favorites!

PAL. He also liked Scotch music ?

MRS. B. Anything Scotch.

PAL. My poor angel too. Ah ! a violin ! (*taking it from piano*)

MRS. B. Do you play ?

PAL. Indifferently.

MRS. B. "Annie Laurie" ?

PAL. Sweet "Annie Laurie" ! (*they play*)

MRS. B. (*after "Annie Laurie"*) "The Keel Row" ?

PAL. The inspiring "Keel Row" ! (*they play*)

MRS. B. (*still playing*) Take care ! You're out of tune. (*stops*)

PAL. Excuse me. (*stops*)

MRS. B. It's F natural.

PAL. F sharp !

Re-enter MR. PONSONBY, R. ; he stops short, takes book from table.

MRS. B. (*pointing to the music*) F natural.

PAL. I was in error.

MRS. B. Try again. (*they continue playing. PONSONBY goes up behind screen*)

PAL. You're out of time.

MRS. B. Excuse me.

PAL. You're too slow.

MRS. B. It's you who're too quick.

PAL. This is a dance, and it would be impossible to dance so slowly.

MRS. B. Not at all ; the measure is so marked. Stop, I'll show you. (*rises from piano*) Now, go on playing. (*PALLISER continues playing. MRS. B. dances—then both dance a Scotch reel, getting more and more excited, till it culminates in the wildest possible climax*)

PON. (*applauding*) Bravo, encore ! (*they turn. PALLISER puts down violin, crosses to piano, and MRS. B. sinks in chair L. of table R.*) Pray don't let me interrupt you.

MRS. B. Have you been there long ?

PON. Since the F natural ; and I must ask you to forgive me for the intrusion, since I wasn't invited to the concert or the ball.

MRS. B. Ah, if you only understood the motives that prompted us to this apparent gaiety—

PON. Don't apologize. I can't sufficiently thank this gentleman for his endeavors to distract you from your sorrows.

MRS. P. (*rising*) Mr. Ponsonby, my solicitor—Captain Palliser, the new tenant.

PON. I trust we shall better our acquaintance.

PAL. Over dinner!

PON. Ah—you stay to dinner? (*takes hat from sofa, goes up stage and puts it on piano*)

MRS. B. Will you join us?

PON. On condition that you resume, this evening, the duet I unfortunately interrupted.

MRS. B. Then we shall meet again. Excuse me for the present. I must give my orders. (*going to door R.*)

PAL. (*opening door R.*) Permit me, madam. (*exit MRS. B., R.*) How like Henrietta! (*crosses to L., plunged in meditation*)

PON. I beg your pardon. Like——?

PAL. (*turns*) A lady, sir, whose premature demise has dashed the cup of happiness forever from my lips.

PON. Excuse the question, I ought to have observed you were in mourning.

PAL. She has the same distinguished bearing—the same amiable manner—but she plays better—yes, she plays much better—a firmer touch, more expression.

PON. Indeed! (*sits left of table R.*)

PAL. Have you known her long?

PON. I have been Mrs. Bellringer's solicitor for years.

PAL. Ah! then you knew her husband?

PON. Well?

PAL. (*moves up towards portrait*) Was he the paragon he's represented?

PON. He was a very ordinary sort of man. His wife had money, (*PALLISER turns quickly*) and he lived on it. A very ordinary sort of man indeed!

PAL. (*coming down*) Then, Mrs. Bellringer has money?

PON. A subsistence—just a subsistence!

PAL. Well, a subsistence is not to be despised.

PON. By no means, sir.

PAL. (*by PON.*) But she was very happy, it appears?

PON. Appearances are not always to be trusted.

PAL. Well, I am given to understand they had their little moments of ill-humor——

PON. To tell the truth, a worse assorted couple never lived. Mrs. Bellringer hadn't a moment's peace till they were separated.

PAL. Separated!

PON. Certainly. I drafted the deed of separation.

PAL. Then how do you explain the lady's grief?

PON. (*rises*) A not uncommon instance of perversity. (*crosses L.*) But a more aggravated case I never knew. Here is a woman, qualified to adorn the home of any man, vowed to perpetual widowhood.

PAL. It seems a pity, doesn't it?

PON. A thousand pities!

PAL. So handsome!

PON. So accomplished!

PAL. And with a little money.

PON. It's a thousand pities.

PAL. Do you believe she'll keep her vow?

PON. I give her six months.

PAL. Six months?

PON. Not a day more.

PAL. Then, I presume, you wouldn't be displeased to see her married?

PON. Nothing would give me greater satisfaction.

PAL. (*turns R. and returns*) You are her man of business.

PON. Her father's before her.

PAL. I think you said she had a little money?

PON. A subsistence.

PAL. A subsistence. Sit down. (*bringing chair from near portrait*)

PON. Certainly. (*they sit—PONSONBY on sofa, PAL-LISER on chair*)

PAL. I am the wreck of a man, Mr. Ponsonby. I have sustained a loss which is irreparable. At the same time, it is, perhaps, my duty to make one last effort to be happy. It is also my duty to do what I can to assuage the unhappiness of others——

PON. In plain terms—for I'm a man of business——

PAL. If Mrs. Bellringer would be content with what poor remnant of a heart is left to me, it is at her entire disposal.

PON. This is a little sudden, isn't it?

PAL. In my melancholy situation, if I did not act suddenly, I should not act at all. If I consulted my own in-

clinations, I should remain a bachelor ; but I can hear a voice within me crying, "Palliser"—she always called me "Palliser"—

PON. Who ?

PAL. Henrietta.

PON. Oh!

PAL. "Palliser, do not sacrifice yourself upon the altar of my memory!" Her slightest wish was always my command ; and if I didn't instantly obey——

PON. What happened ?

PAL. I regretted it.

PON. Under those circumstances, hadn't you better speak to Mrs. Bellringer ?

PAL. In our forlorn positions, such a course would scarcely be becoming. It would jar, Mr. Ponsonby—it would jar.

PON. What do you mean to do, then ?

PAL. (*rises and puts chair back*) You are her man of business. (*coming down again*) You will speak for me ?

PON. (*crosses L.*) Really, Captain Palliser, I am a lawyer, not a matchmaker. However, if it would assist you——

PAL. (*going towards door, R.*) I can hear her foot-step. Ah, I should know it in a thousand. (*goes up stage to window*)

PON. (*turning*) Where are you going ?

PAL. Into the garden, whilst you speak to her.

PON. That is your wish, then ?

PAL. It is Henrietta's ! (*exit through window to R.*)

Re-enter MRS. BELLRINGER, R.

MRS. B. Where is Captain Palliser ?

PON. His feelings were too much for him ; he's gone out into the air.

MRS. B. How thoroughly I sympathize with him !

PON. It's a sad case.

MRS. B. (*looking off R. at window*) Here is a man, gifted with every quality to make a woman happy, vowed to perpetual celibacy.

PON. Still in the prime of life.

MRS. B. So *distingué* !

PON. Such a musician !

MRS. B. So like Ferdinand !

PON. (L. C.) Then you admire the Captain!

MRS. B. (R. C.) If it were possible for me to admire any one, I think I never met a man more calculated to inspire regard.

PON. Oh ho! we're convalescent!

MRS. B. I said, if it were possible! Unfortunately it is quite out of the question!

PON. Then it's no use submitting to you a proposition which I'm authorized to make?

MRS. B. What proposition?

PON. The offer of the Captain's heart and hand.

MRS. B. The Captain's heart!

PON. I should have said the remnant of his heart.

MRS. B. The Captain's hand?

PON. In marriage. What am I to tell him?

MRS. B. It is not to be thought of!

PON. Then don't think of it.

MRS. B. It is an insult to the memory of Ferdinand!

PON. I'll tell him so! (*going up*)

MRS. B. Stay, Mr. Ponsonby, don't use those words. They wouldn't sound kind.

PON. I don't think they would.

MRS. B. And after all, the Captain didn't mean to be offensive.

PON. On the contrary——

MRS. B. It's a compliment he's paid me.

PON. So it is!

MRS. B. The greatest that a man can pay a woman.

PON. Very true.

MRS. B. Tell him I'm deeply sensible of the great honor he has done me—but——

PON. But it's quite out of the question. (*going*)

MRS. B. Stay, Mr. Ponsonby; don't put it in that way. Have some regard for feeling and good taste.

PON. What shall I tell him, then?

MRS. B. Tell him——

PON. That——

MRS. B. Tell him— (*re-enter PARKINSON, L., with letter*) What's the matter now?

PARK. He won't go!

MRS. B. Who won't go?

PARK. The gentleman who wants to see you.

MRS. B. I'd forgotten him.

PON. Who is it?

PARK. He won't give his name, but he'll wait until you're at liberty.

MRS. B. I will see nobody.

PARK. But he's come all the way from the River Plate on purpose, m'm.

MRS. B. From where? (*staggers backwards*)

PON. The River Plate!

PARK. And he seems in a dreadful state of mind. First, he was going to write to you—then he said he'd see you—then he said, "Give her this, and I'll see her after she's read it." (*gives MRS. BELLRINGER the letter*)

MRS. B. His handwriting!

PON. Bellringer's! (*takes the letter*)

MRS. B. Ferdinand!

PON. So it is!

PARK. Your husband, m'm. (*MRS. BELLRINGER sobs*)

PON. What's the matter?

MRS. B. The surprise—the joy—the shock—this unexpected happiness. Oh, Parkinson! Oh, Mr. Ponsonby! what am I to do?

PON. Go down at once and welcome him.

MRS. B. Yes, I will go!

PON. Embrace him!

MRS. B. Yes, I will embrace him!

PARK. I'll run and say you're coming, m'm! (*exit L.*)

MRS. B. This sudden joy—this—this—I cannot move—my knees are trembling under me—support me, Mr. Ponsonby! (*about to take his arm. Re-enter CAPTAIN PALLISER through window. Captain Palliser! staggers aside*)

PAL. (*down L.*) I cannot control my impatience. I must know—

PON. Sh!

PAL. Is there no hope?

PON. Sir, my authority is at an end. I must refer you to the lady's husband.

PAL. Husband?

PON. Who has unexpectedly turned up.

PAL. Bellringer?

MRS. B. Ferdinand!

PON. Under these circumstances, your presence here is open to misconstruction.

PAL. I understand, sir; I will take my leave.

MRS. B. You're not going?

PON. Only one course remains to me. I will at once put an end to—— (PONSONBY *opens letter*)

MRS. B. Stay, Captain Palliser! Do nothing rash!

PAL. Life has no charm for me.

MRS. B. Am I not equally unhappy?

PON. *and* PAL. You!

MRS. B. To see you in this terrible distress. There may be some mistake. Perhaps it's not Ferdinand!

PON. Hadn't you better read what he has to say?

MRS. B. (*takes letter*) I will! (*opens it*) "My own dear wife."

PAL. Then it *is* he!

MRS. B. "I write this on a bed of yellow fever——"
Ah! (*drops the letter and staggers back to piano*)

PON. You've dropped the letter.

MRS. B. I can read no more!

PON. (*picking it up*) "If, after a long interval, our lost loves came to life——"

PAL. Farewell, madam!

MRS. B. Good-bye!

PON. Stop, what's this? "December, 1898."

MRS. B. The very month he died!

PON. "I send this last appeal for your forgiveness by a friend——"

PAL. A friend!

PON. "He does not sail for England for some months. Before it reaches you, you will be free." (*warn curtain*)

Re-enter PARKINSON, L., *wiping her eyes.*

PARK. Oh, ma'am, it isn't him!

MRS. B. Not Ferdinand! (*overjoyed*)

PAL. Who is it then?

PARK. A friend! He wrote that letter just before he died.

MRS. B. Then he is dead!

PAL. Hurrah! (*covers his mouth*)

MRS. B. Oh, Captain Palliser! (*enraptured*) I am indeed——(*drops on a sofa*) a most unhappy woman! (*hides her face*)

PAL. (*sitting down beside her*) Madam, it shall be my endeavor to console you. (MR. PONSONBY *stands watching them, tearing the letter up, with a grim smile.*)

PARKINSON *also stands astonished, still holding her handkerchief*) Do not weep! (*he raises her*)

MRS. B. (*smiling*) Captain! (*drops upon his shoulder*)

PARK. (*short and sharp*) Oh! (*puts up her handkerchief*)

PON. (*short and sharp*) Hem! (*sits suddenly, produces a small volume from his pocket and affects to read*)

PAL. (*rising*) Mr. Ponsonby!

MRS. B. (*rising*) Did you speak?

PON. No, I was reading!

MRS. B. (*incredulously*) Reading?

PON. Yes. (*showing volume*) "La Bruyère." (*she drops her eyes*)

CURTAIN.



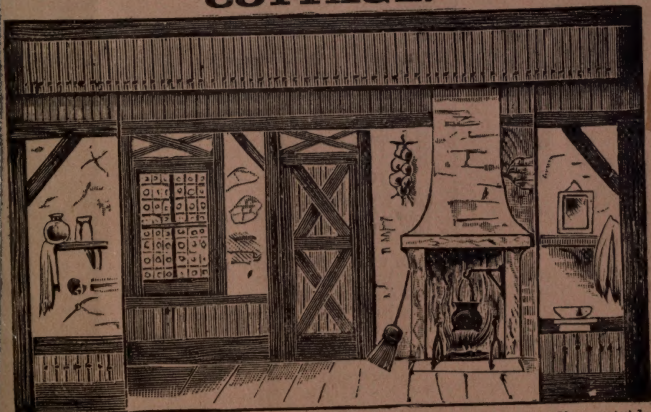
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